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# STET

A UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
STUDENTS' UNION PUBLICATION

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## *Editorial . . .*

In common with many other things on the campus this year, STET has a new appearance. The financial situation of the Students' Union has forced us to omit all pictures. However, since the University students are supposed to be able to read, we shouldn't really need pictures to amuse them.

We have had some criticism from the comic-book crowd about the type of material printed in the past issues of this publication, but we are certain that if we wrote **Reader's Digest** instead of STET on the cover they would read every word in it and enjoy it.

The first prize in the writer's contest this year goes to Mr. Cairns, and second prize goes to Mr. Kamra. There was no problem in deciding that Mr. Cairns should win; the only question was which of his writings we should print. We hope you like our choice.

# SNAKE STORY

K. KAMRA

In India, stories about snakes are just about as common as they are about fish in this country.

In my village most of these stories came from Natha Singh whom we teasingly called the "village headman." We would be gathered under the shade of a bunya tree, which served as our community hall, for a mid-day siesta, while the hot sun beat down on the fields. Presently, Natha Singh would come along with a straw cot in one hand and a hookah in the other. He had a seat next the trunk of the big tree which nobody disputed. He was always welcomed with joy, and once he had sat down, the crowd would draw nearer, for he had the unusual gift of making people forget their troubles such as the impending drought and their rising debts to the village money-lender. We teen-age boys were particularly fascinated and would fight for the position nearest him.

Natha Singh was an unusual looking person. He was over seventy but quite spry and had a light complexion on which the hot sun would sometimes make ruddy blotches but never quite succeed in tanning, while his beard was long and white like a waterfall. The most unusual thing about him, however, was his eyes. Natha Singh had blue eyes. Now blue eyes in India are about as common as the peacocks on Main Street in America. People often gossiped about these eyes . . . about a traveller from the North beyond the great Himalayas and the Sea who had stopped overnight in the village in grandfather's time. Natha Singh, however, had his own explanation; a blue snake had dropped from the blue sky and spat into his eyes. This he claimed enabled him to make conversation with the snakes. We boys believed his story rather than the village gossip and wished that someday the blue snake might decide to drop in from the

blue sky again and spit his venom into the eyes of some one of us.

While Natha Singh was busy drawing great big puffs from his hookah, somebody in the crowd would say, "Natha Singh, how come you got blue eyes?" At this a roar of laughter would go up from under the Bunyan. This was the usual signal for Natha Singh to tell us all about his conversation with Balu, the three-headed seven-tailed cobra that held daily seances with him. Balu had said that the Monsoons were on their way and the first cloudburst would follow the dusk when the cricket started to sing in Sher Khan's field. Natha Singh would go on and on, his stories giving a strange sense of well-being to the farmers. Then when the burning sun had begun to sink, they would trudge back to their fields with renewed hope while we boys waited and listened for the crickets to sing at dusk. Sure enough, one day they would and next morning the thunder clouds would drench the parched fields.

Now when I had grown up and had finished at the village school, my father decided to send me to high school in a distant city. I went to say goodbye to Natha Singh and to tell him how I hated to go away. Putting his hand on my shoulder he made me sit down on the rug and told me that Balu had said that someday I would grow up to be a learned man who would go away to far places beyond the Himalayas and the seas. I was filled with excitement and asked him to thank Balu for me.

At high school in Lahore I learned a lot of things that I had never known before. One of my subjects was zoology and my zoology teacher knew a great deal about snakes. At first I refused to believe that there were no snakes that could fly like eagles or become invisible like ghosts or even have two heads. The snakes at the



school museum all had but a single tail, nor did they glow in the dark like Natha Singh's snakes. Now that Natha Singh had been found out I began to hate him for spreading superstitions and falsehoods in the village. Together with my teacher and another boy I went about investigating and exposing any unusual snake-stories that were brought in by the servants at the boarding school.

Now after three years, my schooling was over and at last I was heading home on the train. I was eager to fascinate the boys in my village with tales of the great city in which I had lived for three years and to tell them all the things I had learned in school. One other thing I was going to do . . . I was going to expose Natha Singh at one of his sessions under the Bunyan tree. I would tell him: "Natha Singh, you are a liar . . ."

We were now passing through the semi-desert of Gujerat. I was gazing into the night. A full moon was racing the train and the weird stunted trees seemed to go in endless circles. Suddenly in the window glass I saw the reflection of a man sitting across from me. I had not noticed him before and his look startled me. His neck was twisted and he could not move his head without having to turn his whole body. One of his cheeks was unusually flat and had a deep imprint on it as if somebody had slapped him, and in his eyes I saw fear. I moved into a seat next to him and he seemed to like me for it but he avoided my questions. "It was an accident, I fell on my face," he said. This evasion made me even more curious and I could not take my eyes away from his face. Suddenly he blurted out, "Oh what's the use! You won't believe me! You would never believe me!" Slowly he stammered out his story:

"There was a drought in my village," he said. "I left home to find work in Lahore. A year ago, after I had made some money and bought some jewelry for my wife. I was returning to my home in this desert. After I got off the train I decided to take

a short cut across the sand dunes. The village elders had warned us about the evil spirits that lurked at night in the dunes. I had lived in the city and I scoffed at the idea. I had gone about a third of the way when I saw a black hooded cobra dart in my direction from a shrub. I lost all strength to run and it bit me on the legs. I fell on the ground. It came on me again and struck a blow to my cheek with its black hood. The cobra then slithered over to my bundle and took my wife's jewelry to the shrub. Suddenly I saw another snake. It was long and sleek and had blue markings that glowed in the moonlight. It came to me and sucked the venom from my body. Then I saw it in mortal combat with the cobra, who was soon chewed to pieces. After the struggle I fell into a deep sleep. Next morning when the hot sun woke me, I could not straighten my neck. I found my jewelry under the shrub, and a few feet away was the torn lifeless body of the cobra."

The train soon arrived at Rajkot and the man with the twisted neck got off. I had an impulse to go out and investigate, but as I left the train a fear gripped me and so I returned to my seat. Even the engine seemed to hiss like an angry snake as the train pulled out of the yard. My village was four hours away. I began to think of Natha Singh, his blue eyes, and of Balu. I decided I would leave them alone.

Presently, the familiar landmarks of my village began to appear: the deserted shack of the hermit on the outskirts, the mud-houses tinted by the colors of the dawn, and the grove of mango trees upon which the monkeys chattered away. Suddenly my heart began to pound as I saw dying flames in the village cremation pyre.

Natha Singh had died two days ago. He had been bitten by his pet snake and had refused treatment.

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**K. Kamra** is a fourth year engineering student at the University.



# Flight

By A. T. CAIRNS



Out of the warmth and light and stifling gaiety of the chalet he stumbles, half blind with baffled, impotent anger and shame. What a fool she's made of him!—and he of himself! The stinging satire of her rebuff, his own blushing, inarticulate confusion, and the supercilious taunting eyes of her companions burn, a livid core, at the centre of his consciousness as he buckles on the skis. He couldn't stay inside! He had to get out, get away from the sly laughter and sidelong glances of the party by the fireplace and the inhuman, impersonal fish-stares of curiosity from the week-end crowd. He had to feel the cold, clean air of the mountain night; see things in solid blacks and whites with no subtle shading or innuendo.

Now he stands ready, taut and crouched, a fine sifting of snow from the dissolving cloud mist falling about him. At his feet stretches the long, open slope, deceptively smooth in the diffused, uncertain moon-glow. Furiously, with a pressure that bends the bamboo poles till they snap at him, he is off, clear of the ledge and hurtling down the treeless straightaway. This time there are no manoeuvres to lessen speed, no wide swallow's glides of turns, no short, quick leaps from side to side. Lithe skis plow two fine, straight furrows through the unbroken white field; loose, powdery snow fans out from his heels like spray in the wake of a speedboat. Faster and faster he goes till each hump or cornice is a spring-board, sending him on long, level flights inches above the snow, and the wind smooths every wrinkle or crease in his clothing, molding it to his body. The falling snow bites into his already flushed face, heating it from dull red to scarlet,

and his eyes are mere slits against the torrent of air and ice. Ahead a clump of trees bars the way, forcing him into a slow, agonizing turn. Centrifugal force presses down on his shoulders like a giant's foot. Moving in a straight line once more, he slowly rises again to the normal half-crouch of the expert skier. Down, far down, the slope ends in a precipice, a sheer drop of about fifty feet with, beyond, only a narrowing path through the forest. His scarf, torn free by the wind, whips across his eyes blinding him momentarily, then is snatched away. He tries through blurred, watering eyes to center the thin white trail beyond the jump. There is no attempt to turn aside, to alter his course, as he quickly regains the momentum lost by the turn. Something must break, either the fury swelling within him or the body straining to hold it in.

Then, almost without realizing it, he is over the edge and for long, ecstatic seconds glides with infinite ease through the night, outstretched arms rotating slowly. In front, above, on both sides—everywhere and everything — is the sky. Then comes the jolt that telescopes his whole body, grinding joint into joint, jarring the blood from his head. One moment he's falling forward on his points, the next brushing the snow with his slacks. The sensation of speed returns, emphasized by the forest rushing by on either side. Desperately he strives to regain his balance and at the same time avoid the obstacles that rise up in front of him every other second. The trail has narrowed until there is barely room to pass and he twists and turns frantically to miss a tree or rock, ducking instinctively the branches hanging

low across the path. Anger, shame, fury, all are gone, his whole being concentrated in a fierce determination not to be destroyed, not to be vanquished by nature in her cold, white cloak of winter. He misses a boulder, but in so doing is brought head on at a young pine. An instantaneous lurch to the left is not enough, his shoulder strikes the tree, not quite upsetting him but numbing the arm. The remainder of the run is a nightmare of uncontrolled, uncontrollable speed, of pain surging over him like a cresting wave, of impossible situations and near-miraculous escape. Snow, shaken from the overburdened branches, cascades blindingly over him while the underbrush claws at his ankles

and calves with blind, grasping fingers, determined to drag him down.

Then all at once he is free, coasting slowly through the deep, yielding snow of a large clearing to come to rest in its center. The moon shines clearer now, the snowfall has all but ended. Behind him rises the mountain, no longer impressive now it has been beaten. All the shame and hurt of outraged pride has been burned out of him, leaving only a great emptiness and sense of futility, and a dull, throbbing monotone of pain. Slowly he starts back to the chalet.

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A. T. Cairns is 21 years old and is in his final year of English at the University.



# MARXISM AND RELIGION

*by William V. Stilwell*

The world outlook of the Marxists is dialectical materialism. Atheism is an integral part of this philosophy. Marxists believe that the material world exists, independent of our consciousness of it; that is, the real world is there whether we know it or not. Our ideas about the world are more or less a reflection of reality, although not, as the word "reflection" might suggest, a mirror image, for we combine our sense-data in different ways, emphasizing now one aspect, now another. The

point is simply that Marxists believe there is a material world and that it is primary; they believe that we have consciousness and that our consciousness is a reflection of reality.

The obvious alternative to this view is that the world is a projection of the mind, and this argument is occasionally heard; this is called idealism in philosophy. We are not concerned here with trying to prove the Marxist case, but merely with stating it. Nevertheless, it may be pointed out

that the materialist view as so far presented occurs to most people as a matter of common sense.

Further, the Marxists believe that the world, including society, develops according to certain laws—laws, that is, in the sense of generalization, like scientific laws—and that if we can discover these laws we can consciously shape our future, at least in broad outline.

The alternative to this view is one of two rather commonly held ideas: either the world is a chaos in which no order can be discerned, or the world develops according to the will of a supreme being. The first has been discredited by modern science, which has shown clearly that the world is not a chaos; and the region left to the will of the supreme being has steadily shrunk as our knowledge of the world has increased, so that we may well wonder whether God is not just another name for Ignorance.

If we can discover the laws on which our environment operates, so that we can control that environment (and our ability to control it is increasing every day) we have no need for a supreme being whose plans for the future are known only to himself and over whom we have no control. Man learned to control the material world (i.e. he made advancements in physical science) and in doing so dealt a severe blow to the ideology and institutions of religion; when man takes the next step and begins to make his own future, we will find that religion has become unnecessary and it will gradually become a thing of the past.

"Religion will become unnecessary." Does this mean that at the present time it is necessary? The answer is yes and no. To some people it is, if not necessary, certainly very useful; to others it is not only unnecessary, it is a dangerous enemy.

We spoke a moment ago of laws of development. There are laws of social development as well as of natural development, and in fact Marxism is chiefly concerned with these. Where do these laws come from? They are generalizations based on a study of history. One of them, the main one, is that since an early time in human experience, society has been divided into classes. It may be difficult at any given time to draw sharp and clear lines, but in general we find that society has

been, and is today, divided into two groups. Broadly speaking, a class is distinguished by the way in which its members make their living. For example, today most people make their living either by owning businesses or by working for those who do; and in spite of what we hear about labor-management co-operation, it is clear that the more the owner pays his employees, the less he has for himself; and in other words, people who work for wages or salary have interests which are diametrically opposed to the interests of the people who employ them. The employers as a group have common interests; the workers as a group have common interests. The employers have associations like the Manufacturers' Association and the Chamber of Commerce, while the workers have unions and labor parties. Call the first group capitalists or bourgeoisie or any other name; call the second the working class; put them together and you have what Marx called the class struggle. The system which embodies this class relationship is known in the United States as Democracy; everywhere else it is called capitalism. Approve of it or disapprove of it, just as your reason and your conscience dictate, but don't pretend that it doesn't exist.

Now, where does religion fit into the picture?

The idea of life after death occupies a prominent place in most religions; almost all of them deplore a preoccupation with worldly or practical problems, and admonish us to think of the soul and of the paradise awaiting us when the mortal coil has been disposed of. If we consider the matter in concrete terms, we find that in effect the advocates of religion preach acceptance of the existing social system and most of its evils in return for a promise of heavenly bliss when the last shift is worked. Or, in the words of Lenin, the world's most successful Marxist, "Religion teaches those who toil in poverty all their lives to be resigned and patient in this world, and consoles them with the hope of reward in heaven. As for those who live upon the labor of others, religion teaches them to be charitable in earthly life, thus providing a cheap justification for their whole exploiting existence and selling them at a reasonable price tickets to heavenly bliss.



Religion is the opium of the people. Religion is a kind of spiritual intoxicant, in which the slaves of capital drown their humanity and their desires for some sort of decent human existence."

There is only one test of the truth of Lenin's statements: observe and think. When you go to church, analyse the sermon and decide for yourself. Consider the unprincipled attacks in press and radio against any church figure who seriously questions the morality of capitalism or of "Western" foreign policy today. Add it all up.

The religious defence of capitalism does not always take the "pie-in-the-sky" form, however. In fact, religionists periodically raise their hands in pious but very polite horror at the "evils" of capitalism and recommend (to each other) that these evils be eliminated, all the time studiously ignoring what is obvious to any thinking person, that the evils of capitalism—depression, war and social degradation—are inseparable from capitalism and can be eliminated only by eliminating capitalism itself.

But when someone suggests action to "reform" capitalism, let alone abolish it, the religionists sigh in sanctimonious impotence, and insult the memory of Jesus Christ by protesting that the minister deals with people's souls, while questions of peace, employment, and social justice should be left to the politicians. This is the easy way out of a difficult situation, and in spite of protests to the contrary, it amounts to acceptance of the "evils" that the church councils occasionally deplore. It is not only acceptance, it is active assistance, for in peddling their corruptive obscurantism, the preachers confuse the issue and make it even more difficult for the bewildered citizen to see the answer to his problem.

The acid test of a person's social conscience today is his attitude to the question of peace or war. Here again with notable and praiseworthy exceptions, we find our black-coated friends doing their best to help what common decency condemns.

The attitude varies somewhat with the nature and country of the people involved. In Britain and to some extent in Canada, ministers of religion have taken a courageous stand in the peace movement. In the U.S.A. a large body of religious opinion is forging the name of Christ on a blank cheque and handing it over to the campaign fund of the Hell-bomb experts.

But the overwhelming majority of religious spokesmen are using the old see-no-evil technique to cover up their cowardice. "We are concerned with peace in the individual soul. When each person is at peace with himself and with God, then we shall have world peace. But I must stay out of politics." Meanwhile the napalm bombs drop and Korean women and children die in the hundreds and thousands. Will you pray for their souls, churchmen?

What, then, is the attitude of the Marxist to religion? Why does he not preach atheism, thus freeing people's minds of this "spiritual intoxicant" that he may more easily show them the way to peace and social progress? The real issues are peace, international trade, international goodwill. We take our stand on those issues. We do not preach atheism in abstract, and we defend freedom of worship along with the other recognized freedoms of expression and ballot. We deal with practical matters of employment, wages, and above all, peace. We welcome religious people who wish to support our movement, and the mass support the Communist Parties of Italy and France draw from a largely Roman Catholic electorate proves that the practical programme of the Communist movement is not incompatible with membership in an orthodox religious organization. The fact that the priests forbid Catholics to vote for the Communist Party will in the end react to their own disadvantage, for human beings may be depended upon to see, in the long run, what their real interests are.

**William Stilwell** is 23 years old and is mastering in the Faculty of Arts and Science.





# "CONFESSIONS OF AN OPIUM EATER"

Frank Kelly

The Marxian proposition that religion is the opium of the people is a condemnation of religion not so much because of the nature of religion itself, but because of the nature of people. People should be denied panaceas, or at least, religious panaceas, the proposition declares. In relegating the opiate religion to the people instead of attempting, for the purpose of making its point, to take God, *flagrante delicto*, in the business of nonexistence, the proposition recognizes religion as a social manifestation. It argues against religion on a social, not deific basis. Indeed, if it were to recognize God, no rational argument could remain against religion as a concept divorced from churches, priests or any or all of the religious trappings. However, the social performance and worth of religion as a social force distinguished from deism can and should be debated.

Religion distinguishes from an opiate in that an opiate brings about only an escape from the reality of purpose or lack of purpose in life, whereas religion is at once an escape from reality and a provider of purpose. Religious purpose is not solely, though mostly, motivation for decent behaviour. It has been the source of inspiration for great art, philosophy and literature; it has been the reason for preservation of ancient culture of the religious kind. Yet its greatest accomplishment is its declaration of a basis for human relationship. No other social power can equal religion in its inter-social purpose. Law can substitute only in small part for it, since religion is an ethical as well as moral force, and law is not just inferior in being only moral in concept, but is inferior to religion in being primarily curative of immorality rather than preventative. Social philosophy on the other hand is essentially ethical, but is not, generally speaking, consistent, and is unfortunately estranged from the obfus-

cated masses. Religion remain the spreader of high social philosophy in the philosophy of altruism and, even if it be only the most palatable form of ethics for the people, has no substitute.

The phenomena of religion on the psychological plane seem best explained by Freud in *Moses and Monotheism*. Freud's work relates to the social-religious concept in being an explanation of the development and behaviour of religion as a mass or social neurosis. Neurotic religious mankind can only be restored to irreligion by psychological treatment, if Freud be correct. Yet, if a neurosis, religion is a necessity—a part of the mentality, perhaps neurotically warped, of mankind—and any question of religion's destruction becomes infeasible until, probably at some distant future time, psychological means can effect it. But religion as a promulgator of social philosophy and ethics, and what is more, the instiller of ethical concepts into man, is entirely satisfactory, is socially salutary, not neurotically enervating. Even Nietzsche's superman conception is really an attempt to find a new religion having a basis in present realism and the idealization of man, retaining the essence of ethics religiously, merging culture and religion in a religion of their creator, man, but discarding the present machinery of religion. What Marx and other anti-religious oppose is the garment of religion, the beliefs and behaviours, sometimes inane, attendant upon metaphysical religion. The machinery of religious evil is also the machinery of its good. Whether that machinery should be reformed or re-created is not our present issue; most are aware that it is not perfect: that it ought to be eliminated is matter for argument. Religion, being a social thing, will always require social, therefore imperfect, construction and machinery.

What we must keep in mind is that we can judge the total worth and necessity of the philosophy of religion distinct from priests and churches, "bread and circuses," just as we can judge religion distinct from deism. We can judge society for its art, philosophy or, ultimately its behaviour. Furthermore, our existence is one in which there are few, if any, blacks and whites; there are shades of grey. For that reason our opinion of religion can be no better than grey judgment. Our judgment can uphold religion on its ethical basis and condemn it for its fantasy, pagan ritualism, or impotence in many immediate practical affairs, whether of state or of the individual, favoring religion because its good outweighs its evil or because our need for what may be the little good in it outweighs any consideration of evil. Even so, our judgment must base itself upon a just evaluation of what is good or evil. For instance, modern proposals that religion be abolished use parasitism as their primary argument. Despite the view that looks upon the defrauded canaille, downtrodden by the heels of the priests, religion is far from being entirely parasitical; in fact, in being partly parasitical, religion may be a blessing in disguise. That is, religious, as parasites, are a form of leisure class. The importance to culture of the leisure class is tremendous; to maintain the culture and traditions of the past, to act as a group independent of the many circumstances which the need to subsist throws into our paths, to develop and improve the existing culture, the leisure class, provided with the opportunity, through their leisure, fulfill a very essential social role. Religion may not provide a leisure class of the very best kind, even as aristocracies do not; in each case there is a considerable number of insignificant among those members of the class who can be called culturally conscious and culturally valuable. But at a time when aristocracy is undergoing disintegration and the new leisure class which seems to be rising from the mercantile ranks has not established itself, the religious increase in importance as a culturally productive, culturally stable group.

For practical reasons, our discussion has been confined to the Christian religion. To have extended it to other religions, such as the oriental, which are essentially ancestor-

worship, or what we call the pagan religions, would involve a different set of social circumstances that might produce a different judgment from that we may have reached on the Christian religion. As with any social force, religious effects vary with time and conditions. In an impoverished state, like the Russia of revolutionary days in which the masses were more concerned with the struggle for survival than anything else, culture and even ethics become unsocial because of their restriction, so that religion, and ethical and cultural asset, can perhaps be justly condemned on purely economic grounds. An economically healthy society can afford the luxuries of morality, ethics and culture. Religion is an asset to such a society, and proposals to eliminate it may be considered insidious; religion actually extends beyond priests and philosophy into what we shall call semi-religion. The abolition of religion suggests the abolition of monuments, graveyards and reverence for the dead, aspects of Christian semi-religion related to oriental religious philosophy; the traditional monument is certainly as parasitical a form of sentiment as the collection-plate. Thus, inasmuch as religion does mean more than its opiate factors, priests, churches, Biblical lore and liturgy, we can condemn it as an opiate only if society is suffering from the effects of gross addiction, not if society is using it with some sanity for its medical value.

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**Frank Kelly** is 21 years old and in his second year of English studies at the University.

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**Notes Towards the Definition of Culture**, T. S. Eliot. Faber and Faber, 1948, p. 28.

"The development of culture and the development of religion in a society influenced from without, cannot be clearly isolated from each other: and it will depend upon the bias of the particular observer whether a refinement of culture is held to be the cause of progress in religion, or whether a progress in religion is held to be a refinement of the culture." And pages 29 to 34 for a good summary of the relationship between culture and religion..

J. C. Sharp, **Culture and Religion**, for a less generous and objective treatment of the subject.

# A MAN AT THE DOOR

ERIC HARVIE

Another door slammed shut behind me, and I was alone once again. I shifted to the middle of the corridor, raised my book to catch the dreary glow from the single bulb overhead, and counted the number I had done that night. Forty-eight, forty-eight dull, slovenly puppets who had played their narrow, hypocritical little drama before me for a moment and then were gone with the closing of a door. They were all the same in each sweltering block of tenements, on each reeking floor, and at every door—mean, petty creatures who glared at me suspiciously with their tired frightened eyes and then grudgingly allowed me to enter to try and penetrate the barrier of hate they had erected around their own insignificance. Forty-eight, and the whole life story of each lay within my hands. I was tired and fed up! I'd had enough of their intolerance and sham to last me for the rest of my life! I was sick to death of people!

It was getting late now and almost time for me to give up for the night. Yet somehow I felt something was incomplete, and I was unsatisfied because of something elusive which I had failed yet to do, or see, or think. I peered into the gloom up the hallway and distinguished a faint yellow slit of light which wedged its way out from under the door of another apartment. Wearily plodding up the corridor, I knocked and waited. There was a rustle of clothing inside as someone started up, moved quickly to the door, and then waited silently for me either to rap again or to go away. Annoyed, I tapped sharply and listened in vain for some response from the other side of the door.

"Hello in there. Is there anybody in?"

"Who is it?" a woman's hoarse voice snapped only a few feet away.

"I'm enumerating the people in this area for the Dominion Census. May I come in and get some information from you?"

A lock clicked, and the door hovered open a few inches to permit two suspicious eyes to glare out. "They've already been here before," she countered sharply, starting to close the door.

I leaned inwards, preventing her from shutting me out. "That was probably the Civic Census you're thinking of. They were around this district a couple of months ago. I'm from the federal government, and I really would like to get you counted this evening. I've been here several times before, but you've always seemed to be out." I paused expectantly while she examined me up and down once again.

"Well, I suppose it's all right," she finally answered dubiously, stepping back slightly so that I could squeeze past her into the room. "It won't take long though, will it? I'm pretty busy right now."

I reassured her that I would hurry, and as I moved into the apartment, I glanced hastily about. It was a limp, faded-looking room in which the drab colors of the stained and seamy wallpaper blended dully with the sun-bleached curtains and furnishings. The room was in utter confusion, for books, magazines, and newspapers sprawled untidily over tables and chairs, bottles of cosmetics cluttered the window sill, and odd assortments of clothes were tossed recklessly over the furniture. Most striking of all though was the room's close hot

atmosphere which clung sweet and thick like the air of a garden hot-house.

Clearing space on one of the chairs, I sat down and began opening my enumeration books. For a moment I could feel the woman stare at me from the door, then moving stiffly in her scarlet and black housecoat, she crossed to the sofa opposite me, picked up the magazine she'd evidently been reading and sat down. She was quite an elderly woman with an untidy upsweep, a pallid skin which hung in folds around her eyes, and a wide ugly mouth that pouted underneath a thick layer of crimson lipstick. She probably had been beautiful once, but as she sat clutching her housecoat tightly around her sagging body and patting into place the sprays of fuzzy gray hair which sprouted out along the back of her neck, she looked worn, beaten and old.

"And what was the name?" I began. "Mrs. —"

"Miss Witherston," she bristled. "Bessie Witherston."

"I see. And you're the only one living here, are you? There's nobody else here besides yourself?"

Her brow wrinkled hideously. "Well, do you think I keep them hidden some place? In a drawer? under the bed? 'Course I'm alone!"

"Thank you," I tried to reply pleasantly, yet the annoyance within me made it sound ironical. She was going to be another of those "difficult cases." "And—a—what was your age at your last birthday, please?"

"What's that to you? I don't see why I have to answer that to anybody!"

"Well, Miss Witherston, any information I get from you is strictly confidential. We're sworn to secrecy, you know."

"A fat lot of good that does! I know a woman who was taking the census a few years back, and there wasn't anything under the sun she didn't tell to anybody that wanted to listen. 'Sides, a woman's age is her own private property!"

I thought quickly. "Well, for anybody who doesn't tell me their age, I usually put down seventy. That ordinarily includes what they really are."

Her back stiffened, and for a moment she spluttered, inarticulate with anger. "Well, of all the—I ought to report you! Well, if—if you're going to have to put something

down—well, really—uh—well, put down—down just a wee bit over forty."

I was generous and marked fifty-three on my card. "Now then, how many years of schooling did you have, Miss Witherston?"

"Oh, for goodness sakes! I don't see why you have to know all that! People around here all the time asking crazy things that don't matter! Nobody'll leave a person alone; they've all got to be asking questions—questions! When were you born? or what was your mother's first name? or what radio programme are you listening to? I'm sick to death of it! I'm fed up! All I want is to be left alone. How many years have I been at school! How would I know? How can I remember? All my life I guess, all—"

"Oh, so you're a school teacher," I broke in on her tirade. "You've had over twelve years of schooling then. I really must say though, I wish you wouldn't take everything I ask as a personal offense. I have my job to do, you know, and it would make it so much easier if you'd just answer the questions."

Her face lit up in surprise—almost shocked at what I said. The impudent young smart-aleck!—she must have been thinking. And yet, wasn't it true? She didn't really mind the questions. Like all the rest she needed somebody to turn upon, someone to blame so that the flood of ill-will and poison within her might be released. I had spoilt her fun perhaps, by showing her that it was not I who was wrong, but rather something, some lack within herself. Just like all the rest she was cold and hard and mean on the outside. And within—

Her anger now began to weaken, and slowly, bit by bit she softened so that at last she almost seemed to enjoy my presence there. And by the time the question on religion came, I knew what her answer would be.

"Christian, of course." Then smugly she added, "I guess you must get some pretty queer answers to that one."

"Well, there are quite a few different religions in the neighborhood."

"Oh, you don't need to tell me that," she squealed, leaning forward confidentially. "Why that couple in number ten are Arabs or some such thing, and down in the basement there's I don't know how many



Mormons. And as for the rest of them in the building, goodness knows what they are!"

I looked down quickly at the questionnaire and continued on. Birthplace, citizenship, racial origin—all pleasantly answered, all supposedly different from the others in the building, and all a hundred percent "Canadian."

"This probably will be difficult for you to answer, Miss Witherston, but could you tell me your approximate salary earnings last year?"

"Oh, gracious! Let me think. There's so many deductions and all I can't just seem to remember. Wait a minute! I've got my income tax receipt right here. No, it's no trouble, really it isn't."

She was up rumaging through the papers in a little desk in the corner, and in a moment she found the receipt and answered my question.

"Well, that's just fine," I said, closing my questionnaire book and pocketing my pen. It was over now; I had all the facts on Miss Bessie Witherston. The card said nothing of her antagonism to me, nor did it tell anything of the cold exterior of her character nor of the smug, intolerant, hypocrisy within. Yet I knew these things, for I had already seen them forty-eight times before that evening. I was fed up and sick inside—people! "Well, thank you for the help."

She started as I began to rise, and her arms fluttered up in front of her. "What—you're not finished already? You're not going? I—I thought there was a lot more to it than that—questions about what sort of stove I have, and how high my rent is, and everything."

"No, we only ask those questions at every fifth house. I think I've got everything I need to know from you. It wasn't too painful, was it?"

"Painful? Goodness no! But you don't really have to go, do you? I—I was just going to make myself a cup of tea when you came. Why don't you stay and have one with me? It won't take a minute, really it won't, and it's awfully late for you to go calling on anybody else tonight. I think I've even got some sherry if you'd like a glass of that instead."

I was startled by this sudden flash of hospitality, for she was standing in front

of me, smiling horribly, and her hands were violently waving me back into the chair. It was late, and I was tired. Maybe it would be all right to relax for a few minutes. Maybe even the tea could make me stomach her for a little while longer.

"Well—I really shouldn't you know, but . . . Tea will be just fine, though—if it's not any trouble."

"Gracious, no trouble at all! The kettle's already on. Now you just sit there, and I'll be right back." She bustled gaily from the room into the kitchenette and then in a moment was back again scooping up the clothes and papers which lay about. "Hope you don't mind the mess. I've been so busy lately, though, I just haven't had a moment's peace. School was out today, you know, and there were all the final reports and the straightening around to do. But now I'll have two whole months to relax and get organized. Imagine: two months! That's almost **too** long though, isn't it? — especially when it gets so hot in the city and quiet from people going away on their holidays. Summer's almost sort of sad, don't you think?"

She was gone again, and I sank back into the chair again. Yet there was something in the way she talked that somehow wasn't quite right, that didn't quite fit into place, and that made me almost uneasy. The summer sad? No, but the first frost in autumn was, and each spring when people graduated and went away not to come back, I knew that was sad too.

"Gracious," she exclaimed, sweeping into the room with a tea tray. "Here I've been rattling on, and I don't even know my guest's name. That's one of the first things I teach each new crop of girls I have every year: never speak to a man unless you've been properly introduced. But then after all, I guess you know just about everything there is to know about me, after those questions and all. What's your name, young man?"

I told her my name as she started to pour the tea. "Roberts? You know that's a very nice name—for a very, very nice person I might add. Sugar? Cream?" I nodded, and she handed me my cup. "I just knew you reminded me of someone I once knew. His name was Roberts, too. Paul Roberts—or was it Robertson? I don't suppose he's any relation? He used to live



in the big brick house just behind where Papa and I lived after Mother died. And such a gentleman he was too! Why every morning it was, 'Good morning, Miss Witherston,' and the way he said it! Then in the winter he'd be sure that our paths were shovelled, and he'd always be doing the little things that meant so much. He was a real, honest-to-goodness gentleman, let me tell you, not like all the men are now—coarse and vulgar and with no respect for a **real** lady when they see one. Those young teachers they've got at the school now, teaching goodness know's what to the children and acting up in the teacher's room just as if they didn't know what manners were at all! I don't know what's got into people nowadays. Everybody's so terribly low and common and horrid — present company excepted, of course."

I tried to sip my tea, but its sweetness made me choke. "Would you like some more hot water? or more sugar? No? Well, how about a piece of cake then? Made it myself just yesterday. Oh, come on. It's not poisoned, really it isn't. Not like some things around here are," she shot out, her voice suddenly vicious. "You know you can't trust people, you can't trust them at all. You think not? You think you can? Then you don't know. You don't know what people are capable of! You see that picture over on the wall. His name was Squeak, and he was just the best looking little friend you've ever seen in your life. And well behaved, too! Oh, a little barking now and then, but nothing to speak of. Dogs have to bark, just like people have to breathe. Well, one day last winter he wouldn't eat anything, and he just sat looking at me, whimpering so terribly. I sent for the Vet, but before he could get here, poor Squeaky started to shake all over just as if he was having a fit. I nearly went out of my mind watching him suffer like that right in front of me. And then after a while he stopped and lay still as a rock just as if he was playing dead dog. Only he wasn't! Somebody had poisoned him. The Vet almost said so, and I know it too. Now why should anybody have wanted to kill Squeaky? What had he ever done to them? Why did they ever want to get rid of a poor little doggy that mean so much to

his mistress? I'll tell you why: because you can never trust people! They always want to see how much they can hurt a person, how much they can make her suffer so that they can laugh behind her back and say to each other how stupid and foolish she is. They say that about me, you know, just because I live alone here, and don't bother with their silly little affairs, and have an interest in some of the *Finer Things in life*!"

I felt alarmed at what she said and the wild agitated way she said it. There was something more in her than what I had first seen. The hate and pettiness—yes, yes, they were still there; but now—something pitiful. A sensation completely new and strange murmured within me, a feeling of understanding, almost of sympathy. And yet the way she craned forward, almost on top of me, gesturing with her hands; the tepid sweetness of the tea; and the hot suffocation of the room's decay made me want to run away from this hot-house, where a withered flower struggled for admiration.

"Oh, you're not going? Nonsense, I won't hear of it. Another cup of tea? Now sit down there. You haven't heard a word about my school. I teach the Arts, you know—English, and music, and dramatics. Have you ever acted in a play? I used to do quite a bit of it in my day. It was wonderful, you know, to be out there on the stage all by yourself with hundreds of people looking right at you, and the spotlights shining down on you, and then just losing yourself in somebody else's character and saying all sorts of things you'd never dream of saying unless you were acting. It's wonderful to become someone else even for a little while! I teach dramatics at school, only somehow it isn't nearly so wonderful there. The children don't appreciate Art, you know,—they don't understand it. All they can think about is playing tricks and making a noise! And lately it hasn't been just the children, there've been men there too —inspectors who say I don't know how to keep control over my class and that it's time for the deadwood to be retired and gotten rid of."

It was like being pulled down further and further in water, the way she talked. I wanted to reach out and help her, and say I was sorry, and console her, and yet

the decadence of the room and the woman made me strike out for air, for if once she clutched hold of me she would pull down and down and never let go. I was frightened, frightened of her. I had to get away, I had to, I had to. . . .

"Oh, no! Don't go; don't leave me here alone! I know I'm just a poor worn-out old thing that nobody cares about, only don't leave me? Just wait till you hear why I'm afraid of being alone. Just wait, just wait! Some—somebody's been sending me letters, poison-pen letters they call them, that say the meanest things about me, things that nobody has any right to say. No, no, please sit down! Don't go! There's — there's something else. There's been a man at my door! I just know it's a man, and he just stands outside there whenever I'm least expecting it or when I'm not decent, and thinks of all the wicked things he can do. Please, please, don't go! I'm afraid, afraid to be left alone! Don't go!"

The door slammed shut behind me, and I was alone once again. It was as if all my energy had been wrung from me, but somehow I managed to stumble down the corridor and the narrow, rickety flight of stairs and to plunge out into the fresh breath of night. I had left her all alone, and yet I was too exhausted to return. But as I stood looking back at the ugly silhouette of the building. I knew that now I was slightly but perceptibly different than before. With the cynic who had seen all and felt nothing was now a laugh, a tear, and strange new warmth.

The lights on the avenue winked brightly at me. I turned and started up the street to join the busy flow of people.

**Eric Harvie** is 20 years old and is in his third year of Arts.

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## *Origin of the Species*

A. T. CAIRNS

The stars . . .  
A handful of tinsel,  
Hung out  
For some celestial celebration?  
Or just dust,  
Sweepings from the floor of heaven,  
Dumped into an unused corner  
Of infinity  
By the lazy street-cleaner  
Of the eternal city  
Who thought that God would never notice  
And for the sin of presumption  
Was turned into Adam  
To be plagued for all eternity  
By his relatives'  
Annoying habit of dropping in at all hours  
To curse him roundly for having permitted  
The loss of his rib, and of the human race  
Who - - -  
Because of his inability  
To stand his own company  
And his propensity  
To follow the advice  
Of his errant rib - - - -  
Were doomed  
To earn their own keep  
And suffer a variety of inconveniences  
Such as being born  
And having to put up with one another  
For some sixty years,  
Then dying,  
Only to find when they got to heaven  
That their most interesting friends  
Had gone elsewhere.



# BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

By  
J. D.  
BROWN

An ominous quiet, like the oppressive silence just before a burst of thunder signalling the downpour, pervaded the Boys' Industrial School. Supervisor Donald Rogers noticed it as soon as he came on duty at four in the afternoon. As he stood carelessly alert at the door of the recreation room, he sensed the mild undercurrent which seemed to have gripped the boys, both seniors and juniors. They were not noisy or boisterous—in fact they lounged around in small groups, reading, chatting. . . . However, furtive glances, fidgetty movements, subdued yet very serious whispering—all these evidences combined to warn Don that there was some conspiracy, that some mischief was planned, that some incident had upset all the boys.

One group listened intently to the "Adventures of Boston Blackie," with the radio in the corner turned low to avoid disturbing those who were reading. Two boys, both about fifteen years of age were playing checkers at the card table in another corner.

Or were they playing checkers? Checkers shouldn't need that much discussion, it seemed to Donald, and as he watched, he noticed them making only occasional moves. A prickly sensation, an obscure feeling of excitement, crept slowly up Don Rogers' spine. From the few year's ex-

perience he had had working with boys at the Industrial School, he could usually interpret their behavior. Unobtrusively, he moved closer to the end of the padlocked cupboard, in front of which a group of boys, all facing inward, making a little circle, were listening to Freeman, a tall burly half-breed, who was a leader among the boys. Their brows were slightly furrowed as they strained to hear every syllable uttered by the speaker. Their heads almost touched. "If I could only catch what they're saying," mused Don, as he edged closer, his gaze intent on something in the far corner of the room.

As Don listened, inching closer and closer to the group, he thought of a previous incident. He had heard bits of conversation, felt the vague, uncertain undercurrent of discontent, and had gone to speak to the principal. "Think you're wrong, Don," the old gentleman had drawled, "but keep your eyes and ears open. Report anything unusual to me." The night supervisor had had something to report the following morning—eight of the boys missing, a bottom window pried out of its casement. . . .

Just then he heard the words "Snuffy Grogan, the old ——." The words became more hushed and he heard no more. Then he heard, ". . . standing for nearly two hours. . . ." So that was it!

Mr. Grogan was the strictest of the supervisors, and the most unpopular. "Snuffy," as the boys derisively referred to him, regularly punished the boys, often without justifiable cause, by making them stand in the gymnasium, for various lengths of time. If anyone moved, even so much as to shift his weight from one foot to the other, a roar of "Stand still!" would freeze him in position.

Don did not agree with discipline of this kind, and often sympathized with the

boys. On one occasion, he attempted to intercede on their behalf. "These guys have gotta learn to fall in quietly. Without any fooling around. Some o' you are too easy on 'em. That's why it's tough for somebody like me, who wants to make 'em learn to do things properly. They'll keep on standin' till I'm ready to let 'em sit down," he said with an air of finality.

Glancing at the group of boys in front of the cupboard, Donald noticed they had spread out more. Apparently they had noticed that their privacy was being encroached upon by an eavesdropper. "Wonder what they're up to," Don thought, as he swung noiselessly through the doorway, on his way to make a routine check of the wash-room in the small basement. Immediately the whispering became louder. Eyes intent on books had seen his departure; stories were set aside and talking out loud took the place of whispering.

Donald Rogers stalked through the vacant school room, down the long, shadowy hall, and glanced into the library. One of the boys, in his early teens, whose business it was to care for the books and pass them out when required, greeted him in his usual way. Arriving at the bottom of the basement steps he saw Sammy Leonard and Bob Hazen chatting earnestly at the far end of the room.

"Well, what are you up to, Sammy?" he asked.

Sammy, who was one of the most popular boys, was Mr. Carlo's helper in the boiler room of the big basement.

"Nothin', Mr. Rogers, jes' talkin' to Bob. We was jes' goin' up." Sammy was pleasant and when he smiled, as he usually did, his mouth curved into a lopsided, rather crooked grin. No one knew what had happened to make his smile lopsided. It just did, and to everyone it seemed like it had always been part of Sammy. His bright eyes flashed, but Donald couldn't be sure whether he was looking at him or not: one eye was crossed.

"All finished in the basement for tonight, are you?"

"Yup! It's all cleaned up, Mr. Rogers, and I put some coal on." Don knew this

was sure. Sammy's face and clothes were black, as usual. It was always rather amusing the way Sammy got the coal dust smeared all over his face; he did it by rubbing his gloves repeatedly across his mouth. As he talked to Don, he was doing it again; it was a nervous habit. Sammy, however, wasn't ashamed of his smudges. In fact, he was proud of them—to him, it meant his badge of professional authority—engineer's helper! He was just a little guy, about twelve, small for his age, and his oversize pants were turned up at the cuff. His shirt, with the sleeves turned up three inches, and a scuffed leather belt with a huge gold buckle, which bunched up the waist of his trousers, emphasized his small bodily proportions.

"All right, you clean up and come on back to the recreation room when you're finished. Bob, you come with me now."

"Funny," Donald thought again. "Everyone trusts Sammy, but all this skulking around tonight!" And he felt a vague apprehension growing as he tramped down the long, dingy hall of the building. The doors were locked, he knew, but still they could be planning a break. It was at least a month since three boys had made their escape from the potato garden. Don wished Mr. Carlo, the school engineer, would finish his work in the big basement and help with the supervision.

When he arrived back in the recreation room all was quiet. Bob had gone ahead with the warning—"jiggers".

Leaning casually against the door jamb again, Donald surveyed the motley looking lot. Some were quite handsome, their hair well groomed, their old clothes made to look quite neat. Others were exactly the opposite. They were dull, listless, sloppy. Shirt tails hanging out. Shoe laces untied. But all in all, they were good boys. Sometimes, of course, they overstepped the mark. Sometimes they ran away; it wasn't hard to do; there were many opportunities. Donald wondered if you could really blame them sometimes. They were lonesome, homesick, or institution-weary, and the old building was so miserable, dark, depressing. The North West Mounted Police had used it as a barracks in the 1880's. "I get tired of it, too, once in a while, and I



only work here eight hours a day and go back to a good home," Don meditated.

Often, Don knew, everything went smoothly for days. Then, with the seeds of dissension planted by a small action, a fight or unfair discipline, the dissatisfaction infectiously spread throughout the school. The calm, broken by only a ripple of discontent could easily flare up into a storm, and tempers would run high. Misdemeanors of all kinds occurred—disobedience, fighting, insubordination. Then, as quickly as it had come, the episode would pass.

Don's glance fell on Fechuk, a fierce looking fellow of fifteen though he looked much older. His short dark hair stood straight up, or fell every which-way. Before being committed to the school, he had worked as a lumberjack, and his strength was phenomenal. He was stronger than any man or boy at the institution. Donald remembered the time he had run away, taking a couple of the other boys with him. If the principal hadn't been there when they finally caught up with Fechuk, the piece of cast iron concealed under his coat might have been used as a very effective weapon. Don shuddered momentarily. That was the trouble: these boys did things without giving any thought of the consequences. They lacked a sense of values. If only they could get into the habit of considering things from the point of view of effects, even, long range effects, they would probably make good citizens.

Don joined two of the younger boys in a game of Snakes and Ladders for a few minutes. "How about singing one song before it's bedtime?" he suggested to Braden Jones, and immediately there was a clamor from all the boys. Braden's voice was a beautiful boy soprano, and as he came to the front of the room, there was a round of spontaneous applause. The boys knew what was coming, and as Braden broke into the opening bars of "A Nightingale Sang in Berkley Square," the boys realized once again that this was their favorite song. Two months previously they had never heard it.

The song over, the juniors lined up, pushing and shoving till they had Braden at the front of the line, even though there were those among the boys who considered it their singular right or honor to take

that position. There was no reason why there should be arbitrary positions in line-up, but it seemed that certain spots were "owned" by certain fellows, with the explicit approval of the whole group. It was even true of the seniors, who were now reading till the juniors had washed, undressed and put on the pyjamas in the little basement.

Fifteen minutes later they arrived in their dormitory, faces red and shining and their hair slicked down with extra amounts of water. They looked good! A chunk out of any group of boys anywhere, perhaps. Thirty boys on any hiking trip or "Y" Camp. But this was no joy ride. When they all knelt down beside their beds to say their nightly prayers and repeat aloud the Lord's prayer, a lump always rose in Donald's throat. He noticed their red feet, the small toes, the clean pyjamas as . . . but in a minute they were up and in bed, one by one. Someone asked for a story.

Donald saw that it was Sammy, now clean and fresh, his head turned a bit to one side, so he could use his good eye. The rest concurred eagerly with the request. It seemed impossible to Don that he could have had misgivings earlier in the evening. These boys seemed content. Still, something told him he should know better than that.

After two pages, some of the boys were asleep, but when Donald decided it was time to stop, several voices piped up, "Aw, no, Mr. Rogers, read jest a bit more, huh!" Finally it was time for "Lights out" and one of the boys offered to turn out the lights, even though Don had to go past the switch on the way out. These boys were like that. As Donald left, it was amazing the number of good-nights which came from the apparently sleeping forms.

By this time, the senior dormitory was settled for the night. Mr. Carlo had come from the basement to attend to his part of the supervising pre-bedtime activities. There was no tom-foolery when he was on duty. Don spent a few minutes chatting to some of the boys. They like to have someone sit on the edge of the beds and talk quietly to them. Perhaps because it took the place of something they had missed in their lives up to that time. It was during little, personal, intimate chats



like this that an impression could be made on boys at the Industrial School. Oh, they tried to be "tough" during the day, talked "big" and tried to act as if they were as infamous as Al Capone, but at night in a quiet, still dormitory, their barriers were down and they bared their hearts, told their secrets, their hopes and little griefs.

In the small staff room, the members of the staff gathered to talk over the events of the day. It was midway between the junior and senior dormitories. Hearing something in the corridor, Donald went to investigate. Fechuk and one of the other boys stood whispering, just outside the dormitory door. They seemed to be handling the nozzle of the fire hose.

"What are you chaps doing out here?" Don demanded.

"Gordon made us stand out here!" was Fechuk's retort, a kind of sneer coloring his tone. Gordon was the senior monitor and had the authority to discipline members of the dormitory.

"What for?"

"Talkin'." Actually Don had no reason to doubt Fechuk's words. Fechuk was troublesome, however. It seemed childish to question Gordon for details. "Well, go to bed now, and see that there's no more disturbance."

"Thanks, Mrs. Rogers," the other boy said.

Again Donald felt as if something was in the wind. Misgivings, indefinite and vague, yet perceptible had persisted in annoying him throughout his shift. He thought again of Fechuk. Always a trouble-maker. And clever! He could be planning almost anything.

Fechuk was a precocious fifteen year old, with a toothy ingratiating smile from a mouth too large for the size of his face. A vague deceptive quality about his countenance made one continually suspicious of him. He was a clever artist, and possessed a good knowledge of English—his vocabulary was extensive. His favorite pastime was studying the dictionary. Often he would try to embarrass members of the staff by asking them the meaning of obscure words.

Don decided it would be a good idea to talk over the day's happenings with other

members of the staff and see if they had noticed anything unusual.

"Well," noted the cook, "Mr. McDonald was telling me that Jones went berzerk in school this afternoon. Apparently jumped out of his seat and just started slugging the person nearest to him. McDonald had a bad time trying to quieten him down."

"Jones isn't like that, usually," remarked someone else. "I thought he was a pretty good kid."

"He works well in the laundry," interjected the matron.

"They are all keyed up about something," Don concluded. "Incidentally, I hear Grogan's sick again and Townsend has to take his shift tonight. You know, that man should quit, he's not well half the time. He's miserable with the boys and everyone else."

"Yeah, the kids hate his guts, you know," put in the cook, a blunt Scotsman, who called a spade a spade. "I hear them talking in the kitchen all the time. Guess he made them all stand in the gym for an hour and a half last night."

Donald noticed that it was midnight, punched out and left quickly. He was on the eight o'clock shift the next day, and wanted a good night's sleep. He didn't leave without telling old George Townsend to be a little more careful than usual, to check up a little oftener, just in case. . . .

However, the next morning at eight, Townsend had nothing to report. "All slept like logs!" he said. Don still wasn't satisfied, and resolved to find out what it was that had all the boys on edge the day before. After the noon meal was over, and the boys were sitting around the gym in little groups, he approached a group of six or eight seniors. They were all his friends, definitely good fellows, who could be trusted. He joined the conversation easily; it was not unusual for him to do so and the boys chatted freely with him.

Finally he said, "What's Fechuk up to?" It was a shot in the dark, but it was his only hope. All the chatter stopped. The boys looked at one another, their faces clouded for an instant. They looked at the floor.

"So there is something!" decided Don. Finally, one of the boys broke the silence.

"Let's tell him. He's always been square with us!"

"Sure! Good idea!" another replied.

"Well, you know old Snuffballs Grogan," began Gordon, the senior monitor. "Everyone hates him. Fechuk hates him most, I guess."

"Never has forgiven him for the time he was put in cells for talking back," remarked someone else.

"Well, he was supposed to have been on duty last night and Fechuk and his pal had it all worked out. They were going to slug him on the head with the nozzle of the fire hose when he came into the dormitory."

"And then what?" queried Donald. The boys stared.

"Oh, I dunno," was their reply. They had apparently never thought of the possibility that time would continue after this act. "What if they had killed Mr. Grogan?"

"I imagine they would have," suggested Gordon.

Upon inquiry, Don found that the plan was "all off" now. "Snuffy" hadn't cooperated by being on duty. However, Don took the opportunity to explain the possible results of such behavior. The office boy on the end of the wire which rang the gong in such a cacophony of racket that you could hardly hear, interrupted him. The boys had to line up for the one twenty-five fall-in.

Donald didn't have an opportunity to see them again that day, but left the school confident that the restlessness would be over. He realized the seriousness of the situation but also knew that such a plot would never be formulated against any other staff member. The boys themselves wouldn't allow it. The requisite necessary

for such action was universal hate, and only Grogan could fill that qualification.

That night, just after the boys had settled down for the evening's activities, shortly after eight, Mr. Carlo went on his rounds checking doors, windows, radiators. When he unlocked the door to the big basement, he was met by a wall of flame. The fire shot out at him fiercely, pushed up by a closed circuit of draught.

Rushing to the office, he switched on the fire alarm. From there he made a quick exit to the outside entrance to the basement behind the scullery, where he found a second wall of flames.

Inside once again, he concentrated on getting all the boys out; there was nothing else which could be done. The city fire department would soon arrive, but in the meantime, the school had to be evacuated. Someone had turned on the fire hose and tried to play the stream into the midst of the flames. They seemed only to lick higher and more viciously.

The fire trucks arrived. But there were no hydrants. The school was two miles from the nearest outskirts. The small supply of water from the trucks was ineffectual. It was apparent that the old building would be completely gutted.

After all the boys had been accounted for and stood about in small, excited groups, one boy stood apart from the rest.

Sammy Leonard surveyed the situation from a distance, a faint smile crooking his mouth. His eyes gleamed brightly as he started at nothing in particular. He seemed satisfied.

And once again, a boy hadn't stopped to think of "after."

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**J. D. Brown** is a fourth year education student.



# *Down With the Humanities!*

MARY-LOUISE HUSTON

An amazing hoax is being perpetrated in all Canadian universities today. Humanistic studies, particularly literature, history, and philosophy, take their places as genuine and useful parts of the university curriculum. That such studies are a medieval throwback to the days before modern science was invented, seems apparent. And yet, every year, vast sums of the taxpayers' money are spent in passing on this singularly futile type of knowledge. Large staffs of professors are maintained; and yet, judging by modern standards, what are they but parasites who suck the life blood of the modern progressive man through their pallid lips?

The standard of value in the 20th century is Progress, and, by this standard, most of the faculties at the University of Alberta are fulfilling their duties admirably. The Doctors and Dentists will make possible the improved physical health and well-being of the future generation. The Agricultural student will find new ways of making the soil more productive, and of producing food of a better quality for all. The Engineer will continue the splendid job he has been doing in constructing useful yet attractive housing structures, safe bridges, and excellent roads. Even the pure scientist, in making new theoretical discoveries, causes the burgeoning of technological improvements — and so we can look for improved vacuum cleaners, dishwashers, and television sets.

The contributions of all these studies to progress is undeniable; and to them, and them alone, can we look for a radiant future of comfort, utility, convenience, and pleasure.

But, what possible contribution to this glorious material progress can be made by the humanities? The answer is: none.

Of what value, for example, is literature? I can read a story, or a poem, and get a momentary feeling of pleasure or interest, perhaps, but this is of no permanent value to me or to anyone else. The ability to quote T. S. Eliot cannot make money. An

awareness of the respective merits of Aeschylus and Euripides doesn't get things done.

If, however, literature were taught at the University to enable students to get the feeling of pleasure I have mentioned, I would not fulminate against it. After all, pleasure for its own sake is one of the things which 20th century materialism has made us justly appreciate.

Instead, however, we are forced to consider the sources of the literary work, the social and personal backgrounds of the author, and structural questions, all of which have absolutely no relation whatsoever to the feeling of pleasure which may be found in contemplating the work as a separate entity.

I feel, however, that the "classics" have been pretty thoroughly superseded by radio and television shows, and, most particularly, by the plentiful supply of inexpensive books and magazines which have colorful cover pictures, large print (in many cases), and interesting, fast-moving stories with no "deep" meanings. They may be picked up at random and read. They relax the mind after a day's toil, without arousing any unpleasant problems or conflicts.

I am not proposing, however, that the study of English be abolished entirely at the University of Alberta. Far from it. Intensive courses in English grammar and spelling should be instituted immediately. The ability to write effective business letters, and to speak eloquently and persuasively is of great value in the pursuit of success.

The study of history, too, is valueless. As Hegel said, "All we learn from history is that we learn nothing." We are totally unable to predict what will happen in history from what has already happened. Contradictory predictions as to the outcome of the present world crisis illustrate very well the unscientific and unreliable nature of historical study. As in the case of literature, a certain amount of pleasure may be obtained by reading history. But I feel

that the stories in the Saturday Evening Post, are, on the whole, more suited to a modern reader. There is great variety—love, mystery, and adventure—and there are no dates, or battles, or difficult foreign names to be kept in mind by the reader. Also there are colored illustrations done by leading artists.

As to philosophy, I would abolish it immediately, with no qualification whatsoever. No possible pleasure can be afforded to the readers of philosophical treatises. The language used is invariably abstract, bristling with technical terms. Philosophical works have, in general, no plot or character to make them interesting. Some of the best philosophers (assuming, for the moment, that philosophers **can** be good) occasionally try to make their works slightly appealing by writing them in dialogue form. But the dullness, and uselessness of the subject matter makes their task an impossible one. Of the various branches of philosophy, I shall speak separately.

Logic, dealing with the laws of thought, constructs a vast superstructure of meaningless statements in symbolic terms, of the form "If all S is P," etc. This is a waste of time, because one learns in practice and unconsciously the laws of rational thinking. To study diligently a mass of symbolic statements, devoid of any relationship to real life and its problems, is the nadir of human folly.

Ethics deals with questions of right and wrong. But, here again, the common man knows the answers without resort to abstruse works on ethics. Things are right when they promote progress and pleasure, and obey the codes of our religion.

Metaphysics is the most abstract of all

philosophical studies, and the most foolish. Metaphysicians ask whether the world we see is really these and whether there is an Absolute Being. Plainly, to spend time with such questions is not only absurd, but sacrilegious.

Philosophy tries to go beyond the limits of human reason, to answer questions that are unanswerable. In the laboratory, experiments can be devised, performed, and conclusions and practical applications drawn therefrom. But the answers to philosophical questions cannot be given conclusively, as the endless disputes of the various philosophers among themselves well testifies. In the end, we must all rely on common sense, rules of thumb, and revealed religion, in dealing with ultimate issues.

The parts of our lives touched by the problematic world of literature, by the evolution of man and society in history, and by questions of good and bad, true and false, existence and non-existence, are not totally without significance.

But, surely, the most important thing is to learn how, with the help of the scientific method, to win increasing control of our environment, and to make it yield in profusion to our eager hands, its richest fruits.

Let us, then, have done with the humanities. They serve only to confuse men's minds, and to cast a grey gloom over the pink and golden sunrise of prosperity and progress which modern science and technology are making possible.

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**Mary Louise Huston** is 20 years old, graduated in 1951 in English and is presently mastering in philosophy.





# FIRST PRIZE AWARD

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## THE J. MacEACHERN ESSAY COMPETITION

### *The Alberta High School Curriculum as a Preparation for University Work*

By DAVID QUIRIN

In discussing the adequacy of the Alberta High School curriculum as a preparation for University work, we must bear in mind the contrast between the small country high school, offering a minimum educational fare, and the "composite" high schools found in the larger cities. It seems that the student from the country school may do just as well as the equally-gifted student from the city when he arrives at University. This suggests that the variety offered by city schools is a superfluity, at least so far as the student aiming at a higher education is concerned.

This brings up the point that it is hardly proper to speak of "the" Alberta High School curriculum. We can distinguish several curricula, having little in common besides English, Social Studies and Health, which are compulsory for all students. In the first place, and of primary importance here, we have the so-called academic program, leading to senior matriculation. This is, presumably, designed to fill the needs of the would-be University student. In addition to this, there are vocational programs, offering a wide range of electives in commercial and technical fields. Finally, some schools offer agricultural courses for farm students. Within each of these groups, there is a wide range of subjects, and the academic student, for instance, may take commercial electives if he wishes.

Each of these programs covers three grades—ten to twelve inclusive—and will take the ordinary student at least three

years, but often four, to complete. It is difficult, if not impossible, to switch from one program to another without loss of a year or more. The student must make up his mind at the time he finishes grade nine, or, at the age of fourteen to sixteen. This period of adolescence is an exceedingly difficult one for the child to make up his mind. Too often, he is totally unaware of what lies ahead, of the conditions of work in, and the requirements for, the many careers of an industrial age. This is largely due to parental ignorance or inadequacy of guidance programs, but is a factor to be reckoned with. Except for students in Agriculture or Household Economics, who may, under certain conditions, proceed to this University from Provincial Agricultural Schools, the student who does not choose the academic program may not go to University without expenditure of considerable time, especially if he doesn't make up his mind until he reaches grade twelve.

Let us, however, leave this undecided youth, and take a look at the one who, since boyhood, had his heart set on a University career, and, accordingly, has chosen the academic program. What does he take? (I shall refer to the course of studies as it existed four years ago; few changes having been made since). In order to acquire his high-school diploma, which is a very pretty thing that everyone ought to have, he has first to gather one hundred "credits". If his parchment is to carry with it Senior



Matriculation standing, and admission to the faculty of his choice, these must include the following Grade twelve subjects: Algebra 2; Chemistry 2; English 3; Social Studies 3; Physics 2; Trigonometry, and the third year of a language.

For certain courses, Biology or another language may be substituted for a science or mathematics course, but we will assume he has taken the above courses. These courses, together with their prerequisites, make up some eighty of the required credits. The rest, or one-fifth of the student's time, may be devoted to electives such as Music, Farm and Home Mechanics, Typing, Dramatics, etc. These are praiseworthy projects, but we shall have to decide if their place is in the school, speaking for the academic student rather than the would-be stenographer.

The compulsory courses may be regarded as basic, certainly, a good grounding in them as desirable for the educated citizen. But, are they sufficient, and is instruction in them carried to a sufficiently high level? Precisely what are the standards? Let us examine the subjects more closely.

First of all, there are the sciences, Physics and Chemistry. Biological Science is generally neglected, except for brief moments during Health courses, compulsory in earlier years. The student, however, takes two years of Physics and two of Chemistry. The progressivist philosophy of education extant in Alberta recently, has idolized science. These two subjects, again, are ideally suited for "learning by doing." The result has been that the standard in these subjects is fairly good and may be termed adequate. However, the survey-course fad is spreading, and there is apparently a movement afoot to replace these courses with a new hodgepodge to be known as "General Science." This is to be taken every year and is to cover chemistry, physics, biology and geology. It does not take much foresight to see that the most likely result will be that the student, rather than knowing a little about physics and chemistry, knows nothing about everything.

Much the same can be said for mathematics in the high school. At present, the student may learn quite a bit of algebra, if he wants to, but the average student doesn't. Insufficient force-feeding is done at this

stage, as most students will neglect mathematics if they are allowed to, little realizing the many uses of this valuable tool in later life. Most students drop mathematics before acquiring enough to be useful, or realizing its potentialities.

Another tool, perhaps even more important than mathematics, is a second language. It is unfortunate that the average student in this Province is only allowed to take one language. All three languages which are offered in the high schools are valuable, French and German to the research worker in any field, Latin to the classical scholar, the historian, the political scientist, and to the lawyer. It is unfortunate that the student could not take a little Greek, as well. Even if we grant the doubtful premise that the matriculant should only know one language, we should make certain that he has a fairly good grasp of it—a reading knowledge at least. We are denied even this.

Especially gifted students may, through extra work, learn enough of a language to be able to use it, but this is not true of the majority. The difficulty here would seem to lie in starting study of a language too late. If Canada is to be a bilingual country, in fact as well as in law, why not start French in the third grade? It has been done on the Continent and appears to work.

Much criticism has been levied at the standards of Alberta high schools in the field of English, especially by the press. This is not peculiar to Alberta, but is common throughout the English-speaking world. It is charged that high school graduates cannot spell, that their grammar is poor, that they cannot write a decent paragraph. All these charges are true, but what the critics forget is this—that standards of literacy, and the proportion of the population attending high schools have risen since they were in high school, usually some fifty years ago. Mass education is still relatively new, and it is probably better to have forty percent of the adult population who cannot spell than to have the same forty percent unable to read or write anything but their name. There are probably just as many good spellers, or good writers, in the 20-30-year-old group as in the 50-60-year group, if not more. This is not to suggest, however, that the student with ability is not held back by being forced to

move at the pace of the slowest member of a class of forty in English 3, who is likely to have an intelligence unsuited to such strain.

One subject remains. It, too, has been the subject of much controversy. Social studies is something new in education. It is an attempt to combine history, politics, current events, geography, economics, and sociology into a unified whole. This positivist dream has been none too successful, although the idea may have been good. Two or three periods a week are devoted to history, one to current events, the other to geography or politics. At least, this is what is done in many schools. Little or no attempt at integration is made—the student is not taught to relate current events to historical perspectives, or to see the effect of geography or political structures on both. This should have been the main purpose of the course, and it was a good one. It is more important, especially today, that the citizens of a country should be politically aware, than that they should be good typists, or good spellers, for that matter. The course is compulsory for all students, and should be. However, unless properly integrated, the variety of subject matter may confuse the student. Here again, the bright student is held back. Perhaps an additional course in history could allow him to progress more closely in keeping with his abilities. Another criticism which may be made of the Social Studies course as it exists, is that too much emphasis is placed on interpretation and not enough on facts. One must, or should, know something about an issue before forming an opinion on it. The grade ten student knowing no history, except a little Greek, cannot be expected, and should not be encouraged, to form opinions on affairs of the day about which he knows nothing. Loose thinking can lead to nothing but trouble.

We have discussed some aspects of Alberta's academic high school program as general education. It remains to examine its adequacy as a preparation for University. This of course depends on what course it is proposed to take at University. For simplicity's sake we will assume that the student is going to enter either Engineering or Arts. The latter is also intended to include pre-professional courses.

For the engineer, who is to take almost nothing but science and mathematics courses at University, I think it can safely be said that the sciences are adequate, maths a little weak, and languages inadequate, especially since the student may lack the opportunity to take more in his undergraduate years.

Engineers' English has long been a bone of contention. Many engineers are semi-literate, while many more are as widely read and cultured as one could ask. The University graduate,, however, has a place to hold in society, even as an engineer. He is expected to be able to write intelligently and to speak good English. It is obvious from many reports that this standard is not being met. However, the fault does not lie in the high school, but in the University. Little or no attempt is made to teach engineers English, or history. It may well be that they are busy full-time with what courses they have, and if so, the solution would be a year or two of "pre-engineering" in the Arts faculty, where they may acquire that knowledge of English, and other general education subjects, which will fit them for positions other than those as mere specialists.

For the Arts student the situation is not dissimilar. He, however, is to specialize in the classics, the humanities, or the somewhat less scholarly social sciences. His great lack is languages and history. As has been pointed out, too little attention is paid to fact in the Social Studies program. Knowledge of dates, for example, while useless in itself, may prevent many an otherwise costly blunder. The student in Arts is expected, when arriving at University, to have a basic knowledge of British history at least, but hasn't. Sooner or later he finds himself in a senior course in some special field and is forced to waste valuable time learning what he should have covered in high school.

What are the remedies? The student is inadequately prepared in languages and social studies, often also in English. The solution to this is to teach more. This means more time in high school. High school entrance could be moved back to grade eight, where it is in most places, and, perhaps a second full year in grade twelve made compulsory. This would give five

years to work with, rather than three as at present.

This leaves us with the problem of the undecided student with whom we started. Must he make his decision a year earlier? No. Grade nine and ten can be given over to an academic program, emphasizing English and Social Studies, while specialization, or the choice between academic and vocational training, can be postponed at least a year to the end of grade ten or eleven. More than two years of high school shop-work is liable to be close to the point of diminishing returns anyhow, while many

students may become interested in higher education than presently.

A possible variant of this scheme would be to adopt a plan similar to that in operation at the University of Chicago, letting students come to University at the end of grade ten or eleven, and awarding the B.A. at the end of what is now the sophomore year. Specialization in Science, Engineering, the Professions, the Humanities, the Social Sciences or Education, would proceed from this point, leading to the M.A. or professional degree.



*beware*

## THE ADS OF MARCH

ANONYMOUS

A TRAGIC DRAMA OF FOUR UNACTABLE ACTS,  
VERY LITTLE DIALOGUE AND ONE  
UNPRINTABLE SCENE

### ACT I

Somewhere in the Garneau district of Edmonton.

A stray ray of the March sun crawls through the frost on the window pane and comes to rest on a desk littered with textbooks, notes, a bottle of aspirin, a dirty coffee-cup, a can of tobacco, an ash-tray full of butts, a final exam's time-table and a student. A picture magazine, clutched in nicotine-stained fingers, completes this typical picture of a university student.

But Edwin McGruder is not a typical

university student—he is not looking at the “Girlie pictures” but at an advertisement on page two. It is one of those “Before and After” types. In the first scene a bulldog-faced damozel is shown dancing with a gentleman of a stature such that his nose is on a level with her arm-pit. On his face is an expression of acute nausea. In the second scene the sad gentleman, who by some mysterious process has grown a foot and a half, is shown surrounded by a herd of seductive wenches all clamoring for the privilege of dancing with him.

Below this fascinating scene is the statement:

Don't be down in the Dumps!—Come up where the air is clearer!—Look people in the Face for a change! And below that in bottle-green print the slogan—Wear Ottis Elevator Shoes!

On the opposite page a deodorant manufacturer offered somewhat similar success to any one willing to spend the trifling sum needed to purchase his product.

Edwin flips the page and sees a half-page ad complete with a comic strip in which a razor blade company tells young men how they can marry the boss' daughter by shaving with a razor blade of a particular shade of blue.

Of course they first have to save someone's life or prevent a bank robbery or a murder but this seems to be merely a technicality of little importance.

Edwin McGruder pauses, he leans back in his chair, closes his eyes and thinks.

#### ACT II

A soliloquy (given by some character as yet unidentified).

"A man is born—he lives—dies—and is forgotten in this ceaseless procession of creation and decay that is existence. At birth he is useless, controlless and generally unpleasant. His parents try to raise him to be that noblest work of God—an honest man.

Despite this—he manages to grow out of childhood into adulthood with ever increasing powers only to wane into old age and uselessness.

Yet—before this sad decline sets in there is one moment—one glorious moment when all his faculties are at their peak. Then, is he most capable of great things—Then the artist creates his masterpiece, the philosopher his philosophy, and the engineer his dirtiest joke.

#### ACT III.—SCENE I

(Same as Act I unless otherwise specified.)

Egbert McGruder is still leaning back in his chair, but gone from his mind are thoughts of such trivial matters as the young man who was jilted in love because his diet lacked BULK. His great moment has come, his mind does those things a mind does when a mind has a mind to do something.

It produces an idea. "Each one of these products practically guarantees social suc-

cess—Use them all at once—and you'll be irresistible to women!"

SCENE II—Same as before except the text-books, notes, etc., have been replaced by boxes, bottles, jars and tubes containing the fruits of years of research by men of science in the manufacturer's laboratories. Each one has been tested by "independent laboratories" and proven to be superior to every and any other one. Edwin McGruder dashes in with new packages at 30-second intervals to add some life to an otherwise dull scene. At long last it comes to an end as Edwin unwraps a large economy size jar (\$1.38 at your drug store) of an armpit paste which modestly claims to immunize the user against B.S.\*

\*Body stench.

SCENE III—This is a very short scene (also without dialogue) which shows Mr. McGruder, all prepared for his conquests, dashing out the door—It is only thrown in to add some coherence to the play and it has no "deeper meaning".

SCENE IV—This is the unprintable scene which is just as well anyway, as there are too many scenes in this act as it is. It extends over a period of two months so use your imagination.

#### ACT IV

Somewhere up till now unlocated by astronomers and other seekers of far away places.

"Welcome."

"Eh?"

"You're Edwin McGruder aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Then welcome to Heaven!"

"Heaven!—What in the Hell am I doing there—uh, here?"

"You're dead you know."

"Dead!!—but what happened—the last thing I remember I was just - -"

"I am quite familiar with what you were doing Mr. McGruder—That is the reason you're here."

"You mean you had me done in?—why in the H - - , - uh - in heavens name wh—uh what on earth for?"

"You've heard no doubt that 'marriages are made in Heaven.' Well I'm the chairman of the marriage-making committee and if I had let you continue the way you were going you would have done me out of a \$10,000 a year job—so TO HELL WITH YOU!"



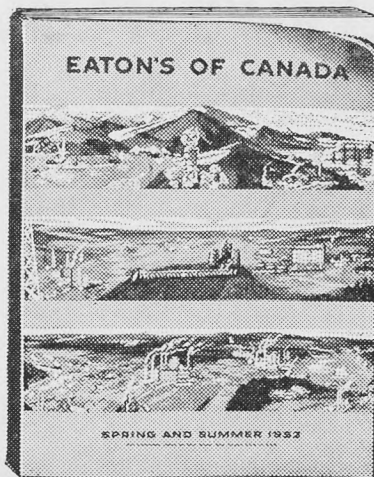


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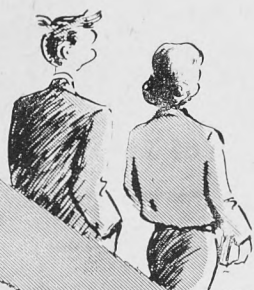
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